



Auteurism and after: A Reply to Graham Petrie

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Evidently Pasolini is searching a new way to express his concerns. The period of disappointment in direct political action is not over, and talking to him one receives an impression of pessimism. Seeking, and not having found—that seems to be his state of the moment, and that would explain why he seems so constantly dissatisfied, so constantly in a hurry. One feels that he recognizes the fact that his work is valid only in the moment of creation, and since the cinema is a dreary, meticulous process, he seems to fear that individual works will take longer to complete than a change of ideology—that his technique may not be fast enough for his developing, galloping ideas. Up here in the Persian desert one feels very clearly that he is traversing his own desert, his own forty years of preparation for another, clearer social view. Perhaps once found, such a view can restore to his works the coherence they once expressed.

The day after I spoke with him, Pasolini, his

actors, his cameras, and his crew were all evicted by military emissaries from the courtyard of the mosque. The Mullahs had phoned Tehran and complained—it seems that donkeys were not supposed to enter the holy area, nor was dancing to be allowed within earshot of the Muezzin. The setback gave everyone time to breathe, but for Pasolini it was disastrous; impatiently he consumed his daily green salad with goats' cheese in the plastic, modern hotel coffeeshop, while the production manager flew to Tehran to try and fix things with state visits and baksheesh. Needless to say, shooting soon resumed, somewhat subdued, somewhat lower in key, closer to the human beings, closer to the dust and the slow speed of the country. The splendor of the mosques and the grand design gave way to a personal concern. Perhaps, in a small way, a road was pointed. A road to a small answer to a large search.

JOHN HESS

Auteurism and After

A REPLY TO GRAHAM PETRIE

Geist: Is there any recourse for a director? Schaffner: What you do is fight to get as many cuts as possible, believing that, with the material and with the people with whom you are working, you are going to arrive, in the end, with your cut. Once you hit a certain level—generally it's true—your cut is the one that's shown.¹

La politique des auteurs states no more than that there are neither good nor bad films but only good or bad cinéastes.²

FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT

Frustrated by the absurdity of latter-day auteurism and dismayed by the low level of most

American film criticism, Graham Petrie has launched an attack on what he calls the *auteur* theory. (Although he uses Sarris's term, Petrie does not directly attack the author of *The American Cinema*.) Practitioners of the *auteur* theory, according to Petrie, "by-pass the issue of who, ultimately, has control over a film"; they rely on intuition alone when they claim that a given film bears the imprint of its director; they ignore the realities of film-making in Hollywood (especially in the period from 1927 to the middle forties); they wrongly insist that "the director's contribution is automatically of major significance"; they discuss marginal films which would be better left to sink into oblivion; and,

they slight, if not reject, the valuable contributions of scriptwriters, cameramen, and actors and actresses. While Petrie's accusations are true of most recent practitioners of auteurism, his article is inadequate for two major reasons.

On the one hand, by focusing on the grossest excesses of recent *auteur* critics, he distorts the importance of these critics and gives an unclear picture of *la politique des auteurs*, its aims, achievements, later development (of which Sarris's *auteur* theory is only one), and its place in film history. After all, the "jeunes turques" who created the *Cahiers* line in the middle fifties revolutionized film criticism, greatly increased the importance of film with relation to literature and the other arts, and created *la nouvelle vague*. What other critical movement has accomplished so much? (Eisenstein *et al* were more theorists than critics.) Petrie's attack on the decadent, heretical perversions of auteurism does not counter this currently popular mode because Petrie does not show how it is a watered down and distorted version of a more interesting, complex, helpful, and valid original: *la politique des auteurs*. Because of this failure to place the subject of his criticism in historical context, Petrie's assault will have no more effect than Pauline Kael's sortie against Sarris's circles and squares.

On the other hand, Petrie offers no clearly progressive alternatives to the present critical quagmire. In general he seems to want us to return to pre-Bazinian impressionism against which the original *auteur* critics so successfully lobbied. He suggests that we burrow into the infinite minutiae of the film industry to determine the exact situation in which each individual film was produced. This xerox, compendia approach to the cinema is not only boring and a waste of time, but it distracts our attention from the aesthetic, economic, political, psychological, and sociological function and meaning of specific films in relation to the society and class which produced them. To invite us "to enjoy a film . . . for its photography, its costumes, its music and even . . . its stars," is asking us to become like the moviegoers of past

decades rather than remain aware people who go to see specific films by specific film-makers. In this article I will discuss the two major inadequacies of Petrie's article and suggest some alternatives to Petrie and also to our present dependency on the mystique of the *auteur*.

I

La politique des auteurs was a product of several ideas which coalesced in French film criticism at the end of the forties. One major component was the Christian/realist aesthetic developed by Roger Leenhardt and André Bazin within the general context of Personalism and the *Esprit* group led by Emmanuel Mounier. Leenhardt was *Esprit's* first film critic when the journal was founded in 1932 and Bazin succeeded him after World War II. This Christian/realist aesthetic is perhaps best summarized in Annette Michelson's trenchant description of Bazin's intellectual position: "Bazin's distrust of the analytic technique, of the disjunctive style, of the metaphoric mode is that of the intransigently religious sensibility. This cultivated and discerning man nursed a latent distrust of art itself except as it might implement the revelation of a transcendent reality."⁸

This religious and philosophical aspect of auteurism has been totally ignored by writers on the subject and disappeared completely when auteurism was imported into England and the United States. This is not the place to go into this complex problem. Suffice it to say that religious and philosophical criteria were as important in determining who was and who was not an *auteur* as was a director's ability to express his world view in the film.

Another force that helped form *la politique des auteurs* was the conviction that film was as important an art form as any other, a claim that was always taken seriously in France since the days of Louis Delluc and Ricciotto Canudo. Finally, and most important, there existed the belief that the cinema could be a personal art through which one expressed one's point of view just as the novelist or painter did through his chosen medium. This belief was articulated by

Jean Georges Auriol and his colleagues in *La Revue du Cinéma* (1946–1949). In the pages of this journal, and later in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, one finds “the notion of the ‘divine spark’ which separates off the artist from ordinary mortals, which divides the genius from the journeyman.”⁴ The belief in the cinema as a personal art had its most forceful advocate in Alexandre Astruc whose concept of the *caméra-stylo* influenced the original *auteur* critics.

Thus, when Truffaut and his friends began to write for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the early fifties, they found a ready-made concept—that of the *auteur*, the self-expressing film artist—which they could use to gain their ends; as Petrie rightly states, these *auteur* critics wanted more than anything else “to make . . . their own films and on their own terms.” What Truffaut added to the concept of the *auteur* was *la politique*: a massive, bitter attack on the established French film industry—producers, directors, actors and actresses, critics, and especially scriptwriters.

What Graham Petrie says about auteurism applies *only* to its most extreme post-Sarrisite manifestations. Although there are isolated indications that he is aware of the stark differences between *la politique des auteurs* (*Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Arts*, 1954–1958) and the *auteur* theory (Andrew Sarris, *Film Culture*, n. 22–23, Summer, 1961, and so forth), his lack of definitions and clear distinctions tars them both with the same brush for anyone who is not intimately acquainted with the writings in *Cahiers* and *Arts* between 1954 and 1958. Let us examine Petrie’s six basic charges against auteurism and compare them to the tenets of the original *politique des auteurs*.

Petrie begins his attack by claiming that “the *auteur* theory was essentially an attempt to bypass the issue of who, ultimately, has control over a film.” This statement has some basis in fact when applied to Sarris; although it is hardly the essence of his theory, Sarris has not concerned himself very much with the issue of control. However, when directed at Truffaut and his colleagues, this charge is absolutely false. As Petrie well knows, Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol,

Rivette, and Rohmer were intensely interested in and concerned with this issue. In fact it is not an exaggeration to say that it is one of the main issues of *la politique des auteurs*. These critics’ attack on the French film industry was based on their opinion that stupid producers and businessmen should not control films, film-makers should. They protested bitterly against the French reluctance to take anyone seriously unless he was old and gray; they did not intend to wait that long for the opportunity to express themselves in film. However, they never challenged the capitalistic structure of the film industry; they wanted to work within a reformed system to gain control of the film-making process. Certainly, their efforts to control every aspect of their own films attests to their intense concern with this problem.

As part of his charge that *auteur* critics ignore the issue of who controls a film, Petrie accuses them of not even knowing very much about the film-making process. While this might be true of many latter-day *auteur* critics, the original *auteur* critics learned all there was to know about film-making. They haunted the Paris studios and discussed film-making with directors, actors and actresses, scriptwriters, and the various technicians needed to make a film. They began to make their own films as soon as they could and they worked as assistants whenever possible. Truffaut wrote articles about all aspects of film-making (mostly in *Arts*). The reason these critics appreciated the glimmerings of personal expression in Hollywood movies was because they concentrated on this aspect of the cinema and knew exactly how films were made. The reviews in *Cahiers* and in *Arts* are filled with precisely the kind of practical information that Petrie demands. The most accessible example of this concern for the practice of film-making as opposed to distilling some mystical “personal vision” out of a film is Truffaut’s *Hitchcock*; there is little in that book about the director’s personal vision and much about camerawork and other related techniques.

Continuing to discuss the issue of control, Petrie charges that *auteur* critics have been un-

able to deal with the fact that a film's visual style might have been the work of others and that the film might not even have sprung "from a deeply felt need of the director's temperament." But the original *auteur* critics were well aware of these possibilities. They felt that real *auteurs*, men like Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, and Welles, understood all aspects of film-making and could by dint of knowledge and force of will control all the significant aspects of a film—directly or *indirectly*. Gregg Toland was responsible for much of the visual style of *Citizen Kane*, but it was Welles who encouraged him to experiment further with deep focus. It was Welles who insisted on that "look." It was Welles who determined the dramatic or symbolic content of each shot. Deep focus is used much differently in *Citizen Kane* than it is in Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). To be an artist worthy of the title *auteur*, a director had to be strong enough to get his way. Truffaut admiringly pointed out how Max Ophüls always reserved for himself the right to quit a project if he did not get his way.⁵

Finally, the issue of control so interested the original *auteur* critics that the in-depth interview became one of their main activities. The *Cahiers du Cinéma* are filled with long interviews with film directors and other *cinéastes*. The focus of these interviews was the director's intentions in a particular film. "Without the possibility of ascertaining the director's *intentions*," Truffaut stated, "criticism is impossible."⁶ Today no issue of a film journal seems complete without at least one interview.

Petrie also claims that the practitioners of auteurism depended solely on their intuition that a particular film "obviously bore the director's personal stamp from beginning to end." Again, this criticism may apply to Sarris and Robin Wood, but to say this in general about *auteur* criticism is utter nonsense. In the first place a typical review in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Arts* never contained an analysis of a film "from beginning to end." In the typical review was some background information about the director, some plot summary, often comments on

the value of the script, and then, finally, several examples of the way in which theme, style, tone, or philosophy expressed the director's touch, his personality. The *Cahiers* critics knew film history very well and they were thoroughly versed in the work of their most esteemed directors—films they liked they saw countless times until they knew them shot by shot, word by word. They did not need to call on intuition to determine that a film expressed the personality of a director whose previous films they knew by heart.

The basis of *la politique des auteurs* was never substantively challenged in the fifties (even by *Positif*, which was more political/sociological, but equally *auteurist*—they preferred Buñuel to Hitchcock). But later when *auteur* criticism, stripped of its philosophical content, was transported to foreign climes, severe challenges appeared. The followers of the *Cahiers* line in England and America were less well prepared than Truffaut and his friends; they could not produce the concrete proof required by their more pragmatic opponents and resorted more and more consistently to intuition. Not being film-makers *manqué*, they were not as aware of the intricacies of film-making as the *Cahiers* critics.

Petrie cites Garson Kanin to support his opinion that conditions in Hollywood during the thirties and forties were not only antipathetic to individual art but made personal expression of any kind impossible. Two points must be made here. First, the original *auteur* critics virtually ignored this period, seeing it as a script- and studio-dominated period which ended the heroic age of the silent cinema. They held up the work of Griffith, Chaplin, Gance, Eisenstein, and Murnau as models for all future film-makers. They did discuss the thirties work of Lang, Von Sternberg, Hawks, and a few others, but primarily these *auteur* critics were interested in contemporary cinema (that of the fifties) and the immediate past. Second, in the American cinema they favored the work of such lesser, often low-budget directors as Hitchcock, Ray, Aldrich, Fuller, Hawks, and the American films

of Renoir and Lang. All these directors were in one way or another outside the mainstream of studio production. In turn they ridiculed the more respected American directors such as Zinnemann, Stevens, Wyler, Wilder, Huston, Ford, and Sturges. This pattern was similar to their approach to the French cinema. They demoted respected directors such as Autant-Lara, Clément, Clouzot, Duvivier, Clair, Cayatte, and elevated such outsiders as Renoir, Ophuls, Cocteau, Becker, and Bresson. This pattern is a manifestation of the *auteur* critics' desire to attack the established industry which prevented them from making films; it also resulted from their fondness for the low-budget, personal film as opposed to the lavish studio product. Clearly, the larger, more expensive, and more elaborate a film is, the harder it is for a single person to use it as a medium of his own expression (2001 notwithstanding).

The next flaw in Petrie's description of *auteur* criticism is his accusation that all *auteur* critics dogmatically assume that "the director's contribution is automatically of major significance." Petrie adds that this idea gave rise to the opinion that "it is *only* the director who matters and that even the most minor work by *auteur* X is automatically more interesting than the best film of non-*auteur* Y." Here again we are dealing with Sarris's reinterpretation of *la politique des auteurs*. The original *auteur* critics were much more interested in artistry and the art of direction than in film *per se*. Therefore they rarely wrote long analyses of individual films, choosing instead to write about a specific director's work. Thus, because of their critical approach, the director's contribution *was* of major significance *to them*. Furthermore, if the director's contribution was not significant in a film, that director could not possibly be an *auteur* and the film was thus of less interest to them. A film warranted discussion only in so far as it was a vehicle of a director's self-expression. The *auteur* critics' overriding concern was with artistic self-expression. Therefore, they constantly compared film directors with other artists—novelists and painters in particular. As *la politique des auteurs*

developed and went abroad, its focus changed from the art of direction (i.e., the construction of scripts, the setting-up and shooting of scenes, the direction of actors and actresses) to a concern for stylistic and thematic similarities in the work of a single director. Truffaut and his colleagues gained insight into the art of film direction; their successors accumulated lists of names, dates, shots, and plots. The list replaced analysis.

The original *auteur* critics wanted to be film artists and thus they fought against the scriptwriters' domination of the French cinema. Truffaut described the scenarist's film as the enemy, the low point in film-making, and viciously attacked Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, France's two leading scriptwriters. "When they [Aurenche and Bost] hand in their scenario, the film is done; the *metteur-en-scène*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it and it's true, alas!"⁷ These critics saw the film director as an artist who could rival the painter, the architect, and especially the novelist. To achieve this status the director had to work his will on the film. If he was able to imprint his personality on a film he did not control, so much the better. The film might not necessarily be a better film, but the director proved himself an artist to be reckoned with. The first *auteur* critics judged directors, not films; their subject of study was the art of direction.

The word *auteur* was very loosely used. Often it was used in a general sense as in "the author of a deed." It is hard to tell when the word carries an evaluative connotation. Beyond Ophuls, Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, Hawks, Ray, Cocteau, and a few others, few working directors were consistently referred to as *auteurs*. And the less successful films of these directors were much more interesting to them than the best films of most other directors. But the labeling, classifying, and ranking of directors which became popular in England and America were not important to the *Cahiers* critics. They wanted to define the nature of film art in such a way that it would mesh with the traditional western European concept of art: a unified, personal

vision of the world dealing with universal themes while at the same time having the "solidity of specification" demanded by Henry James. Their view of art, like that of Leenhardt, Bazin, Astruc, and Auriol, had antecedents in French 19th-century Romanticism as well as in French Classicism. They considered art the product of an artist's individual perceptions and creativity. Only the director of a film was in a position to express himself. Thus the *auteur* critics searched among directors for artists. They studied the films of these artists in order to learn how they created their art. Truffaut once said that film criticism is a kind of combat. For him and his colleagues criticism was not an end in itself, but a preface to making films. But first the hierarchical structure of the film industry had to be changed so that artists could make films as easily as they could write books. After Truffaut and his friends went into film-making, this concern for art in the traditional sense, the desire to change the film industry, and the passionate need to make films disappeared from *auteur* criticism.

Now that the movies *in toto* have been opened up to the intellectual and scholarly analysis they deserve, primarily by the Bazin/*Cahiers* combination, Petrie is perhaps right to say that some films should be allowed to sink into oblivion. But I wonder how quickly he would remove the minor works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Hammett, or Zane Grey from libraries. The *auteur* critics were the first generation of film critics to have all of film history available to them: they were the first generation to know the sound film before the silent film. And this new relationship between the critic and film history radically altered film criticism, film theory, and subsequently film-making itself. Because the *auteur* critics insisted upon judging directors on the basis of their *oeuvre*, the minor works of many directors, including the best ones, have been made available to a much wider audience. Why should I accept Graham Petrie's opinion of *The Sea of Grass* (1947)? I like Kazan's work and want to see the film for myself. And it is due to *la politique des auteurs*, which Petrie is so intent

on denigrating, that I will most likely get to see *The Sea of Grass* and many more films like it.

In an attempt to move away from a dependence on directors as *auteurs*, Petrie cites Goulding's *Dark Victory* (1939) and Rapper's *Now, Voyager* (1942) as films which were made by undistinguished directors, but which are nonetheless important as Bette Davis films. Truffaut *et al.* would agree with both claims. The *auteur* critics, especially Truffaut and Godard, were intensely interested in film acting. They discussed and enjoyed *Giant* (1956) as a James Dean film, regretting only that he had to suffer at the hands of George Stevens. *Directeur d'acteurs* was a title of approbation second only to *auteur*. Elia Kazan is an example of a director not considered an *auteur* but highly praised for his work with actors. The *auteur* critics fought against the tyranny of stars in the French cinema because their great popularity could influence the direction of a film. Since these stars did not understand the necessities of film-making, their influence could not be creative and productive. As in the case of scriptwriters (and cameramen, too), the *auteur* critics insisted that their contribution be cinematically valid and support the concept the director had of the film. There is no better proof of their understanding of the various people who make a film than the ease with which they attracted and worked with excellent cameramen such as Decae and Cou tard, and able scriptwriters such as Gégau ff and Moussey.

II

If we agree with Petrie, as I am willing to do, that *la politique des auteurs*, including its reinterpretations in England and America and its myriad heretical perversions, is now an historical artifact, we are left with the problem of somehow replacing its principles with other, more fruitful ones or of abandoning the desire to see film criticism based on any principles at all. Petrie asks us to seek alternatives to *auteurs*, to reassess our current principles of film criticism, but Petrie himself offers us no more than the stern admonishment "to avoid the dangers of

replacing one culture hero by another and launching into 'The Cameraman as Superstar' and solemn studies of the personal vision of Sol Polito or James Wong Howe." It seems that Petrie objects to the passionate partisanship of so many *auteur* critics, whether French, English, or American; he objects to the *politique*, the anti-establishment orientation of latter-day *auteur* critics who seem intent on dumping all the old impressionistic criteria which define high art and replacing them with descriptions of the beauties of Frank Tashlin. Their concentration on such individuals, their apparent insistence that "'personality' is some kind of mystic quality that exists in a vacuum, and can be examined in total isolation" disturbs Petrie's sense of propriety, his sense of the reasonable and practical. He offers common sense as an antidote to the excesses of auteurism. However, in the very same paragraph Petrie contradicts his own stated desire to deemphasize the role of the director. He quotes Eisenstein's famous dictum that "it is the director who is responsible for the organic unity or style of the film."⁶ "Organic unity of style" sounds like the same kind of mysticism which characterizes recent *auteur* criticism.

The main difference between Eisenstein and the original *auteur* critics was that he and his collaborators worked in a true collective in which conflicting ideas were unified not only by the director but by the force of a common purpose—the glorification of the revolution. In a capitalist film industry, the rewards go to whoever dominates the struggle for profits. The bourgeois *Cahiers* critics, often using family money, got the opportunity to make films—the Marxist *Positif* critics did not get that opportunity. As long as a competitive economic system dominates film-making, Petrie's suggestion that we must begin considering "the cinema as a cooperative art" is nonsense. Capitalist film-making is not a cooperative art; it is a competitive art. And *la politique des auteurs* succeeded so well because its practitioners recognized, understood, and defended this system.

A second path which Petrie thinks our reassessment might follow is toward "a serious

attempt to analyze the status of the director in Europe (and perhaps America in the silent period and the last five years) as opposed to the Hollywood of 1927–1967—the heyday of the big studios and producers." It is strange that he offers this curious project as one of two possibilities and then abruptly drops it. I assume that his strikingly Sarrisite list which ends the article is there to whet our appetite for such a project. But what are we to think of this compendium? The *auteur* critics would certainly have agreed with the high evaluations of the listed *cinéastes*, with the possible exception of Ford, Capra, Lubitsch, and Losey. What is proved, however, by demonstrating that Hitchcock had more independence than Renoir, and Chaplin more than Welles? All four are great *auteurs*! Certainly an examination of the economic and power relationships which prevailed throughout the history of the cinema must be undertaken. But this project would not have as its goal the determination of specific directors' relative independence; it would concentrate on the relationship between money and art.

Petrie's actual alternative to *auteurs* is not easy to ascertain; he never directly states one. But an analysis of his several suggestions does produce the outlines of an approach which suspiciously resembles that of New Criticism. The more direct statement of his approach to art, found in the Introduction to his book on Truffaut, will enable us to understand the curious suggestions offered as alternatives to *auteurs* throughout his article. "I am interested in how and why one particularly gifted director uses the artistic means at his disposal—camera, editing, music, dialogue, sound effects, silence, colours, settings, objects, gestures, faces, actors, fictional characters and events—and how and why what he does with these affects us, the viewers of the films."⁹ In the first place there is no indication in the introduction that Petrie intends to consider the contribution of the scriptwriters, cameramen, actors and actresses, or other technicians who influenced Truffaut's films. Petrie has hoped to avoid this problem by selecting a director who has had almost total control over

the films he has made. Truffaut's Art is the subject of the investigation. Petrie suggests in his article that we "learn to enjoy" the various formal elements of the films we see—esthetic pleasure is what Art provides us with. But apparently we can only experience this joy once we have assured ourselves that the artist in question did indeed have full control over all the formal elements involved. This formalist approach takes us back to the pre-Bazinian impressionism against which modern French criticism has struggled.

In the light of Petrie's more direct statement about his approach to art, we can better understand why he quoted Eisenstein's dictum about organic unity, why he is so desperate to know how much actual control a director has had, why he chose to write about Truffaut, and why the most independent directors are listed as "creators" even though Petrie denies the existence of any value judgements in his classifications. One of Cleanth Brooks's famous articles of faith states "that the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity—the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole."¹⁰

Graham Petrie is a misplaced Fugitive, yearning for the palmy days when art was art and trash was trash. He does not want to pursue the study of a director "into the deepest recesses of the hack and commissioned work that the director may have been forced to turn out." Why a study of Renoir's *Toni* (1934), *Elena et les Hommes* (1956), and much of his early work means penetrating into "deepest recesses" is unclear to me. But, the fact that Petrie wants a "dividing line" drawn between a director's art and his trash follows from his New Critical bias. The effect of the *auteur* critics' love for *les films maudits* and their curiosity about and appreciation of the lowliest genre films was to open up all films to serious intellectual investigation and discussion. Petrie wants to overturn this triumph of good sense in the name of Art and return us to the elitism and exclusivity of past generations.

It is only in terms of Petrie's New Critical orientation that we can understand the inordinate significance he gives to the apparent existence of some great films "where directional control has been negligible, or where other contributors have played an equally significant role." According to him an investigation of this phenomenon should be "a major concern of film criticism." Only the New Critic and, ironically, the *auteur* critic could find a great work of art which has no apparent unifying force a fascinating anomaly of major significance. Indeed, the difference between organic unity and personal vision in art is merely a matter of semantics. Both concepts imply and even depend upon the existence of an "unifier" (to use Eisenstein's term), a central, unifying intelligence. In the last analysis, the incoherence of Petrie's article results from the fact that by attacking *auteur* criticism ("at its heart"), he attacks his own position. His traditional brand of bourgeois formalism competes with an ascendant, rebellious brand of formalism for the ears of the public. This is a humorous spectacle, but not one to be taken seriously.

Petrie's "major concern" is not likely to become the main focus of film criticism. When Petrie calls for a reassessment of film criticism, he purposely ignores the three areas from which new discoveries about the cinema and our relation to it are emerging: structuralism, semiology, and Marxist criticism. In his book on Truffaut, Petrie refers to these "uses" of film and while admitting that they occasionally produce interesting insights, he rejects them because they lead to distortions of the films in question. For, according to Petrie, "the arrogance of refusing to respond to or to recognize the *whole* of the creative experience is more an impoverishment than an enrichment."¹¹

The basis for Petrie's complaint against latter-day auteurs (whose obsession with themes borders on a kind of bland structuralism) as well as his rejection of the so-called "uses" of film is the issue not so much of control, but of respect for the autonomy of art. Bourgeois formalism demands that art be autonomous, that

its relation to society not be considered, that its value be wholly self-contained. Thus genuine art can exist in the cinema only when the director (or some other artist, man of genius) has absolute control over the final form. Structuralists, semiologists, and Marxist critics all deny the autonomy of art, considering film an ideological link between individuals, groups, classes, and societies. Structuralists see film as the obsessive working out of insoluble social contradictions (wilderness and civilization, for example). Semiologists see film as a complex text transmitted by individuals and groups and received by other individuals and groups. Social and linguistic conventions form the base of many of their insights into the film medium. Marxist critics see films as a product of the classes which produce them. In capitalist countries (where most films are made) films are dominated in form and content by the ruling bourgeoisie and are an ideological weapon in the class struggle. In all three cases the examination of a film's social context becomes more important than the film itself. Social ills, maladjustments, and manipulations come to be seen as more important than their manifestations on celluloid.

The impetus for all three modes of film criticism comes primarily from France. Claude Lévi-Strauss's investigations into myth stand at the root of structuralism. Charles Eckert's recent article and the accompanying bibliography in *Film Comment* (v. 9, n. 3) give an excellent introduction to structuralism (especially as it has been practiced in England). Christian Metz and Roland Barthes are the most influential semiologists; *Cinema* (Beverly Hills, v. 7, n. 2) has provided a valuable "Guide to Christian Metz." Marxist criticism has received new impetus from recent writing in a variety of French journals such as the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (which is now completely dominated by Marxists) and *Cinéthique* edited by Gerard Leblanc. Translations from the French and original articles in the English journal *Screen* (v. 14, n. 1-2) are also important sources for those who do not read French. This mode of criticism has advanced most in America due to the fine writing

of Julia Lesage, James Roy MacBean, and Brian Henderson on Jean-Luc Godard's recent political films.¹² Writers in other film journals, namely *Cinéaste* and *Critique*, have made valuable contributions to Marxist criticism, as have the reviewers for many radical newspapers and journals.

The atmosphere of analytical rigor emanating from France since the days of Bazin, the rapid growth of professional film scholarship in this country, and the growing awareness that a new cinema which is more able to contribute to the increasing social changes in this country is needed, combine to insure the trend away from New Critical impressionism toward a more systematic and even scientific examination of the film medium. *La politique des auteurs* and its progeny are now historical artifacts; our only fruitful response to it today is an examination of its origins, development, and influence. *La politique des auteurs* grew out of the socioeconomic, intellectual, and cinematic milieu of France in the decade after World War II; it was a weapon which young bourgeois intellectuals, critics, and film-makers turned against their stuffy elders who still relied on the aesthetic criteria developed for the other arts to evaluate and discuss the few films worthy of serious examination. The *auteur* critics are now part of the establishment they fought against, and a new generation of young bourgeois critics are using certain aspects of structuralism, semiology, and even Marxism against them.

The time for flagellating poor, tattered auteurism has passed; it has had its day, done its thing, and passed on into history. Graham Petrie's frustration with the poverty of much American film criticism is understandable, but "Alternatives to Auteurs" is an inadequate response because it further confuses the controversy surrounding *auteur* criticism and because it fails to note and appreciate the significant reassessment of film criticism and theory which is already well underway.

NOTES

1. *Film Comment*, vol. 8, no. 3 (September-October, 1972), p. 36.

2. *Arts*, No. 653 (January, 1958).
3. Review of *What is Cinema?* *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 10 (Summer, 1968), p. 70.
4. Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Authorship," *Screen*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1973).
5. *Arts*, No. 613 (April, 1957).
6. *Arts*, No. 529 (July, 1955).
7. *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*, no. 1, p. 36.

8. *Notes of a Film Director* (Dover, New York, 1970), p. 113.
9. *The Cinema of Francois Truffaut* (A. S. Barnes, New York, 1970), p. 8.
10. *Kenyon Review*, vol. 13 (Winter, 1951), p. 72.
11. *Truffaut*, *ibid.*
12. Lesage, *Cinéaste*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Summer, 1972), 42-48; MacBean, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Fall, 1972), 30-44; Henderson, *Socialist Revolution*, no. 12.

BRIAN HENDERSON

Critique of Cine-Structuralism (Part II)

This text is concerned with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* text "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" and with Ben Brewster's notes on this text in the most recent issue of *Screen*.¹ The *Cahiers* study is most interesting for the method of reading films which it proposes and carries out. Brewster's article reads the *Cahiers* reading. It also seeks to provide the *Cahiers* method with an altered or improved theoretical underpinning. In so doing it seems to turn *Screen's* important work on Christian Metz in a distinctly new direction.

The *Cahiers* methodology is set forth clearly at the outset of the *Young Mr. Lincoln* text.

1. Object: a certain number of "classic" films, which today are *readable* (and therefore, anticipating our definition of method we will designate this work as one of reading) insofar as we can distinguish the historicity of their inscription: the relation of these films to the codes (social, cultural . . .) for which they are a site of intersection, and to other films, themselves held in an intertextual space; therefore, the relation of these films to the ideology which they convey, a particular "phase" which they represent, and to the events (present, past, historical, mythical, fictional) which they aimed to represent. . . .

2. Our work will therefore be a *reading* in the sense of a *rescanning* of these films. That is, to define it negatively first: (a) it will not be (yet another) commentary. The function of the commentary is to distill

an ideally constituted sense presented as the object's ultimate meaning (which however remains elusive indefinitely, given the infinite possibilities of talking about film): a wandering and prolific pseudo-reading which misses the reality of the inscription, and substitutes for it a discourse consisting of a simple ideological delineation of what appear(s) to be the main statement(s) of the film at a given moment.

(b) Nor will it be a new *interpretation*, i.e. the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (metalanguage) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext, when he is not a hermeneute à la Viridiana slotting things into a pre-ordained structure.

(c) Nor will this be a dissection of an object conceived of as a closed structure, the cataloguing of progressively smaller and more "discrete" units; in other words, an inventory of the elements which ignores their predestination for the film-maker's writing project and, having added a portion of intelligibility to the initial object, claims to deconstruct, then reconstruct that object, without taking any account of the dynamic of the inscription. Not, therefore, a mechanistic structural reading.

(d) Nor finally will it be a demystification in the sense where it is enough to re-locate the film within its historical determinations, "reveal" its assumptions, declare its problematic and its aesthetic prejudices and criticize its statement in the name of a mechanically applied materialist knowledge, in order to see it collapse

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Notes

¹² **Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group: Film and Dialectics**

James Roy MacBean

Film Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 1. (Autumn, 1972), pp. 30-44.

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